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The Nativity, by H. L. Rolle

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A GLORIOUS CHRISTMAS IN THE KACHIN HILLS OF BURMA

By Lucy Bonney

We Were Strangers and Ye Took Us In

The deeply moving autobiographical story of a family of displaced persons from Europe, father, mother, two daughters, one son, who escaped from Estonia and with American Baptist help have resettled in the United States

By EWALD MAND



The Baptist Theological Seminary in Tallinn, Estonia, in its wartime ruins. Before the war Mr. Mand was professor here and at the same time was pastor of Tallinn's First Baptist Church

NOTE—The author of this autobiographical article is pastor of the First Baptist Church at Rockport, Massachusetts. As displaced persons, commonly known as D.Ps., he and his family came to the United States under contractual assurance by the Andover Newton Theological School. As a youth Mr. Mand was leader of the Baptist Youth Movement of Estonia. After four years of study at Andover Newton he returned to Estonia in 1935 with the degrees of Bachelor of Divinity and Master of Sacred Theology and became pastor of the First Baptist Church of Tallinn, Estonia's capital city, and Professor of Old Testament in the

Baptist Theological Seminary. He is an accomplished writer of poetry and fiction. A volume of poems is published as well as several novels. Literary critics in Estonia have appraised his literary work so highly that he is now one of Estonia's recognized novelists. His books are usually translated and published also in Swedish and German. His latest novel, with the prophet Hosea as the leading character, is soon to be published. Since his own settlement in the United States with his family Mr. Mand has been of great assistance in the resettlement of other Estonian displaced persons in the United States.—ED.

SOMETIMES it takes a personal experience to put meaning and content into a well known Bible verse. For me the text, "I was a stranger and ye took me in" was just another verse until I myself became one of the homeless strangers, many of whom even yet roam the face of the great globe and starve their

souls in an endless waiting in the displaced persons camps in Central Europe. The text became meaningful because of some of the most tragic and joyful experiences of my life.

It was in September 1944 when my much-suffered native Estonia was once more invaded by a foreign army. On the shores of the Baltic



Rev. Ewald Mand and his family, Mrs. Elli Elis, Elmet {the boy,} Merike Vaikex and Eabti Marje. The boy was born during the long blackout and never saw lights until he was three years old. On the wall is a portrait of Mr. Mand painted by a Rockport artist. Rockport is a famous artists' colony

Sea the Russians and the Germans had battled it out. They had plundered, burned and deported in turn. Now the Nazis were leaving and the communists were returning. As the Russians were approaching I was a prisoner in a Nazi prison knowing that one foreign foe was just as cruel as the other and that in either case the fate of my family and myself was dreadful. As the front line was drawing closer the Nazi guards could not stand it and they deserted and fled. Thus we, 4000 prisoners, got out of the gloomy fortress by the sea. There was a train in the station, but it was so crowded that I could not get in. Together with some other people I climbed on top of one of the box cars. Eventually we pulled out of the emptying capitol city. As the train speeded through the country many burning villages lighted our way. And yet the night was calm and starry. I could not enjoy it, for already the poignancy of homelessness was gnawing my soul. However, prison doors and walls were left behind and I was free again and able once more to rejoin my family. Thus I came to the fishing village on the western coast, where I had left my family before the Nazi secret police had taken me. The meeting was happy beyond words.

Two days later the entire country, except the coastal strip, was occupied by the Russian troops. The remaining strip was subjected to

constant bombing. When our villages burned, the Nazis, knowing that their time was short, began to plunder, rape, and kill before they had to take their departure. There was no law, no order, no mercy, no love. A fellow minister who was also hiding in the village had a small sailing yacht anchored in the bay. As we watched the ever changing conditions it became clear to us that we had to flee to save ourselves and our children. Thus, one gloomy morning we put our families aboard and sailed away. Three days later we were welcomed by a friendly Swedish artillery captain with a kind, "Willkommen til Sverige!" We were free people in a friendly and democratic country.

As my three year old son came out of the ship's hold he looked around with amazement. The soft night was descending and the lights were kindled in countless island homes. "Daddy, is it Christmas?" he asked. These were the very first lights he had seen, for he had been born and brought up in the blackout. When he was only a month old he had to go underground together with his parents and two sisters. Now the lights of a free and happy world greeted us. I understood the feelings of my wife when she whispered to me, "I have not been so happy even on our wedding night."

It is a wonderful feeling, to be free again after nights of anguish, when one is listening to the rumble of distant motors and wonders whether this is the secret police car coming to get me,



Rev. and Mrs. Ewald Mand in the garden of Herman S. Sherburne, a deacon of the First Baptist Church at Rockport, Mass. Gardening is his hobby and he supplies the flowers for the sanctuary

and after days of horror, when one has said last farewells to one's friends, who look down to you through the bars of a prison train, which is going to take them to the slave camps in the nameless wastes of a strange country.

Once I was a stranger, but now I was taken in.

And then there is another night which we will always remember, the night when we came to our first home after many months of homelessness. But this was already on this side of the Atlantic Ocean.

For many days we had been living in the homes of our friends. I was lecturing in my Alma Mater, the Andover Newton Theological School at Newton Centre, Mass. Because of the war-time housing shortage we could not get a home. Our family was divided between the homes of two faculty members. Mrs. Mand, myself and our son stayed with Dean and Mrs. Vaughn G. Dabney, whereas our two daughters slept at the home of Rev. and Mrs. Richard Smith, the assistant to the president. Although these friends were wonderfully kind to us, we were naturally longing for our own home. I had candidated in the Baptist church in Rockport, Mass., and soon the call came and we could move into our new home. Our moving fell on a day when New England put on one of her worst blizzards. Two faculty members loaded all of us and our belongings into two automobiles and our exodus from Newton Center began.

We had visited the town and had taken a look at the parsonage. Unoccupied houses are, as a rule, rather bleak and uninviting, especially when they are cold and out of repair. As we drove through the rain, the sleet and the snow, we saw visions of an unheated, unfurnished and gloomy house before us, but as we arrived we discovered that the place was brilliantly lighted and crowded with people. Wondering whether we had not made a mistake we entered. All around us we saw smiling faces. During the two preceding weeks the members of the church and some of the town's folk had been diligently working. The parsonage had been made into a real, friendly home. All articles of furniture, including even a radio, had been donated by the good people. Everything was in its place. There were rugs on the floors, curtains at the windows, tablecloths on the tables, china and silverware

in the cabinets. The beds were made up and there was plenty of food in the pantry. On the red hot stove a wonderful chicken-pie was sizzling. As we discovered later on, the people had the time of their lives getting everything ready for us, and as the work was finished they were so excited that all of them wanted to be on the reception committee. And yet they tell me, that Yankees are cold and unresponsive people!

It is small wonder that after such a welcome our stay in Rockport has been blessed in many ways. The congregation has been ever increasing, the spirit of cooperation is lingering, the missionary giving has increased 100%. The Sunday school is doing excellent work. However, all the time we have had the feeling that we have brought nothing with us. The spirit was all the time here, the latent but productive Christian spirit, which was awakened by a specific need and began to do wonderful things.

My story should end right here but it does not. For there are thousands of homeless people in Europe and countless opportunities in this wonderful country. Every day the mail brings more letters from destitute parents and hopeless young people. For years they have been living in the unhealthy conditions of refugee camps knocking on the closed doors of free countries. So we have tried to do something for them.

Last February I received a letter from an Estonian architect, requesting my help. I did not know him. However, the letter was sincere and I liked the tone of it. So I decided to do something for him. As the summer guests had left, it was not too hard to secure a temporary apartment. A construction firm in Boston promised to do something about a job. Thus the assurances were given and the family sailed for America. As the day of arrival came we went to meet them a little hesitantly. How will they be? Is he going to be able to support his family in a new country? Well, all these questions are always there when such steps are undertaken.

The family arrived, the father, the mother and two girls of 12 and 14. They were quiet, cultured, clean-cut people. We took them home for supper and later on to the reserved apartment. The ice began to melt and we all felt much better. We advised the father not to worry about the job too much and to rest a few days. How-

ever, the next morning he was already in Boston. Unaided, independently he began to seek for a job. Three days later he found employment with an internationally famous construction firm. After that we have been much bolder in our attempts to help the homeless.

The experiences so far have been very encouraging. All the Estonians, with whose cases I am better acquainted, have been able to find jobs right after their arrival. Most of them are working where there has always been shortage of labor, in agriculture and in domestic jobs. An elderly couple was recommended to a college as cooks and they were so well liked that now we have placed there four other displaced persons. The specialists and well trained people have been able to take positions in their respective fields. The adjustment is for the Baltic people rather easy because the Estonians and the Latvians are culturally very much akin to the Americans. They have a high level of education (illiteracy was almost unknown in Latvia and Estonia), they are Protestants, and have in most cases a working knowledge of English, which they have studied in their schools. But this same is also true of many other European displaced persons. I have met Russians, White Russians, and Polish Baptists here in America. In all the cases they have been a decided blessing on the communities which had accepted them. Religion itself has a wonderful educational effect on a person, and most of the displaced people are warm-hearted Christians.

It is true that there is still a housing shortage here in America. "The problem of finding jobs for people is not too hard to solve," a fellow minister recently told me. "However, it is more difficult to find housing for them." Sometimes we are unduly discouraged because we plan in terms of American standards. One has to remember that these people have been for years

cramped together in camps. Two rooms and a kitchen will be a dream fulfilled for them. In some cases the sponsors have bought expensive furniture for the newcomers and thus placed unwillingly a burden upon them. The people who are beginning their lives anew want to make a clean start, and if they buy furniture they want something which corresponds to their tastes. Meanwhile a bed, a second hand chair, and a table will be sufficient.

However, to give a frank account of the experiences I must confess that some of the cases have not worked out so well. Letters have come from several Southern states describing conditions which are deplorable. Southern Baptist churches have sought to avoid such situations. In some cases, contrary to previous contracts, the displaced persons have been compelled to work in unhealthy conditions for nonsubstantial pay. They have been placed in uninhabitable cabins which even poorly paid negro help has refused to occupy. The wind and rain destroy their belongings. The garbage and sewage goes under the floor. The stench, as a consequence, is unendurable. But worse still, costly purchases are made for the new comers and charged to them, thus indebting them to the company and making it impossible for them to escape these intolerable conditions. The newly established Estonian weekly, "Waba Eesti Sona" (*The free Estonian Word*) has published some letters from such persons appealing to their fellow Estonian Americans to assist them.

Fortunately these cases are very few. The new Americans do not need pampering and babying. They do, however, expect an honest and Christian attitude, for they also are future Americans.

To be a stranger is a sorrowful and depressive experience. To be taken in is a Christian experience to be remembered forever.

Northern Baptist Churches in order to do their part in the resettlement of Displaced Persons, must resettle 1200 families by June 30, 1950. For information about how your church may give an assurance to resettle a Displaced Persons family, write to Rev. Jobu Yasumura, The American Baptist Home Mission Society, 212 Fifth Ave., New York 10, N. Y.